

Jefferson Davis and the Northeast Georgia Fair

By E. MERTON COULTER*

IT all started when Henry Grady got the inspiration to organize a fair to boost Atlanta and invite President Grover Cleveland to be the greatest attraction. The fair was held in early October, 1887, and was called the Piedmont Exposition. Cleveland and his newly-wed wife came and remained two rainy days. Grady nearly missed his prize as Cleveland had been on the point of cancelling his acceptance when he learned that some Atlantans had had the happy thought of inviting another President, a past one, not of the United States but of the Confederate States of America—Jefferson Davis, to share honors with him.¹ Grady saw to it that no invitation was issued to Davis.

Grady's exposition may have seemed to be a sort of interloper to the directors of the State Agricultural Society, who were preparing to hold their annual fair in Macon, near the end of October, and it may have suggested to them that Davis could outdo for Macon what Cleveland was supposed to do for Atlanta. Davis would not be a novice at an agricultural fair for he had attended many such and spoken at them; a dozen years previously (in 1875) he had made a triumphal tour through Missouri, speaking at fairs on agricultural subjects.²

So, off for Biloxi, Mississippi, sped William J. Northen, the president of the Agricultural Society, to invite Davis to attend the Macon fair. As Davis was now approaching his eightieth birthday and was in poor health, it took all of Northen's powers of persuasion to wrestle from him a promise to come. A feature of the fair would be a vast foregathering of Confederate veterans, who would never have another chance to pay homage to their great leader. This touched Davis's heart, but his acceptance, he said, would give "my enemies a pretense for partisan criticism."

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He finally agreed to attend if his health permitted and no unforeseen circumstances otherwise intervened.³ The managers of the Macon fair now spread the word that Davis would definitely be there, and they began marshalling the old veterans for what they said would be the final review by their old chieftain.

Now for ten years Davis had been living in peace and retirement at his Beauvoir estate, fronting the Gulf of Mexico, not far from Biloxi, Mississippi. Frequently he had visitors from throughout the nation, whom he always welcomed. One from the North reaching the end of his train journey, thus described his arrival: " 'Bul-l-luxy' shouts the blue-coated Kickapoo Indian employed by the Louisville and Nashville railroad to yell stations in Hindostanee for the edification of passengers, and the train with a shriek of derision, halts at a bandbox of a depot surrounded by a wide desert of platform, and you are at Biloxi, Miss." He found Davis, dressed in a white linen suit, much spryer than he was generally thought to be. "Mr. Davis," he said, "bears his fourscore years wonderfully well. It is true his hair and beard are white as snow, but his form is as erect and proudly carried as ever, his step firm and his movements energetic, while his eyes sparkle and shine with the indomitable spirit within. . . ."⁴

Fairs were the order of the day in Georgia at this time—state, regional, county, and metropolitan. Next in importance to Atlanta, Macon, and Augusta, if not equal in some respects, was Athens, where the Northeast Georgia Fair had been held for the preceding two years. As its name implied, this was a regional fair catering to at least eleven counties, with its general officers living in Athens and with each county honored by a resident vice president.

As soon as news reached Athens that Davis had provisionally promised to visit the Macon fair and might possibly go on to Richmond for the unveiling of an equestrian statue of Robert E. Lee, there almost spontaneously sprang the insistent demand that he should be invited to the Northeast Fair and all honorable means should be used to bring about his acceptance. Colonel J. W. Morton, the president of the fair, decided that a committee should be appointed to go to Beauvoir to carry the invitation and that

it should use such strong persuasion "that the old man's soul will melt, and from his eloquent lips will fall the much coveted 'yes.'"⁵ Another Athenian remarked, "Yes, let him come, and he will come, if for no other reason than to pay his respects to Mrs. Howell Cobb."⁶ The editor of the local newspaper, the *Banner-Watchman*, said the City Council should issue the invitation in such terms as to induce Davis to come so that the people might "testify of their great and undying love and respect, in tokens unmistakable."⁷ The committee should "so manage it as to make it beyond the power of Mr. Davis to refuse to come and be with us, and enjoy a regular gala occasion."⁸ There was almost a hysteria that arose over his coming; it was unthinkable that he would not come. "There are thousands of old soldiers," said a news account, "who would gladly welcome their chief to Northeast Georgia, and give him a grand ovation." They wanted him to come "so they can once more behold this good old man who stood by them in the dark days of the Confederacy."⁹

It turned out that Davis was sufficiently invited, for there were three sets of resolutions formulated—one by the City Council, one by a public meeting of the citizens of the town, and the third by the officials of the fair. As was written in one of the sets of resolutions, in view of Davis's physical weakness, the visit was to be "a quiet, informal, but cordial and heartfelt welcome." The wish for his coming was "cherished by the generation which has grown up since the war, as well as by those who were active in the service of the Confederacy." And these invitations included "Mrs. Davis and Miss Davis, 'the Daughter of the Confederacy,' both of whom the people hold in tender and affectionate regard."¹⁰

A group of distinguished Athenians was appointed to carry to Beauvoir these resolutions re-enforced by three personal letters of friends of Davis, all eminent Georgians. Senator Alfred H. Colquitt wrote one of them; Governor John B. Gordon wrote another; and a third which was thought would certainly cause Davis to capitulate was written by Mrs. Howell Cobb, the widow of one of the few supporters of Davis who never failed him throughout the period of the war. Also, Mrs. Cobb had a close

and enduring friendship with Mrs. Davis. While Mrs. Davis was with her husband when he was held in chains in Fortress Monroe, Mrs. Cobb wrote her cheering letters.

On the Committee of Invitation were Congressman H. H. Carlton, former Senator Pope Barrow, Major Lamar Cobb (a son of Howell), Colonel W. J. Morton (president of the fair), Hon. Richard B. Russell (yet to be the father of an eminent Georgia Senator of fifty years later), Dr. J. A. Hunnicutt (an eminent Athens physician), and Pleasant A. Stovall (then editor of the *Banner-Watchman*, later editor of Augusta and Savannah newspapers, and Minister to Switzerland, appointed by President Woodrow Wilson).¹¹ Arriving in Mississippi City, they took public conveyances and were driven along the sandy beach five miles eastward to Beauvoir, where they arrived about five o'clock in the afternoon, to be cordially greeted by Davis and his family. They were soon refreshed at high tea—"no one ever leaves the house without breaking bread with him"—and not for an hour, filled with pleasant conversation, could the committee get around to presenting their invitation.¹²

Dr. Carlton (he was not only a Congressman but also a physician) in a little speech, eloquent and proper for the occasion, reminisced a bit about the war, how he had been captain of the famous Troup Artillery, a unit which was in the thick at Gettysburg and in many other hard-fought battles; and then he began to touch closer to Davis's heart by reminding him that Athens lay in Howell Cobb's Congressional district, which Carlton represented, that Cobb's widow still lived there, and so had the late Benjamin H. Hill and the late General William M. Browne—both close wartime friends and supporters of Davis. He then read and presented to Davis the three letters of Governor Gordon, Senator Colquitt, and Mrs. Cobb, urging him to come to Athens.

Next in this little ceremony, Stovall read the three sets of resolutions by the City Council, the public meeting, and the fair. Davis was much affected by these urgent invitations and by the manner in which they had been presented. "I should love to go

to Athens and see Mrs. Cobb and all her people," Davis replied; but his health was such that he could give no firm answer. He would go on to Athens, if his visit to the Macon fair did not too greatly tax his strength. Also, he had been suffering "with an old Mexican wound in his foot." He had received it at the Battle of Buena Vista when he had hurled his troops into a weakened line and helped to bring about a great American victory—but Davis modestly made no mention of the occasion of the wound. For much of the time during the visit of the Committee, he sat "with his foot upon a cushion."

Yet the Committee was not impressed in the slightest that Davis was an invalid. His head was white and his beard was "short and snowy and his blue eyes and eagle nose mark his face with light and strength," said Stovall later in describing the occasion. His voice was strong and expressive, and Stovall continued, "He is courtesy itself and presides with dignity and hospitality in his home." His grip was "vigorous and his mind" was "as clear as the air."

The other members of the family present were Mrs. Davis and Winnie. Winnie's real name was Varina Anne Jefferson, but her father early and affectionately called her Winnie, and she had in recent times been honored with the title, "Daughter of the Confederacy." Of the other Davis children, Jefferson, Jr., had died of yellow fever in Memphis and Margaret had married J. Addison Hayes, and was then living in Colorado, but would soon visit Beauvoir.

Winnie was now a "captivating young woman" of twenty-three, captivating more for her culture and charming personality than facial beauty. As Stovall saw her: "Fair-face, dark brown hair, melting blue eyes, fine white teeth and an elegant figure, she is a fine specimen of young womanhood." Winnie was all for going to Athens. "O, I am delighted at the idea of going back to Georgia," she exclaimed; but she added that her father would do what her mother thought best at the time. Mrs. Davis was "stout, hearty and whole-souled." Her voice was "sweet, her manner magnetic, and she seems to be one of those strong, sensible women,

who has brought to her husband the dower of good judgment and cheerful nature." So she appeared to Stovall.¹³

As the Committee was making ready to leave, Winnie brought in a box of fine cigars and passed them around. Of course, every member took one; and though "protocol" might have suggested sitting further for a few minutes for a sociable smoke, all found reasons for not doing so. The universal desire was to keep these cigars as mementoes of a never-to-be-forgotten occasion, to be handed down to their children and grandchildren.¹⁴

The Committee departed with the firm conviction that they had won an outstanding victory; they had captured the great Confederate chieftain. As Stovall put it: "But under all circumstances and with all the lights before us, I do not think there is any doubt that Mr. Davis will visit Athens during our fair. A committee will wait upon him in Macon, and bring him in a special car over the Georgia railroad, . . . reaching Athens Friday or Saturday of next week [October 28, 29]. It will be a great day for Athens and Northeast Georgia."¹⁵ And as for that "special car," Joe White, the Traveling Passenger Agent of the Georgia Railroad, said that Davis would ride "in the handsomest car and the most superbly decorated car ever seen in the South."¹⁶

Before the Committee had gone to Beauvoir, out of respect for Davis's poor health Athenians were arguing that if only he would come, they would pledge to give him "an informal, undemonstrative, loving welcome, full of recollection of what he was and full of appreciation for what he is."¹⁷ There would be allowed no crushing crowds, no hand-shaking, and no speech-making to sap his strength, and he would be given the protection of an infant and housed in a private home—Mrs. Cobb's, of course. As the Macon fair would close a few days before the Athens fair began, Davis could use this period for resting peacefully in the Athens bracing Indian atmosphere.

And on receipt of the positive information that Davis would come, Athens went wild. The Athenians now declared that from the time Davis had been inaugurated in Montgomery in 1861 up to the time when he would arrive in Athens no ovation he had

ever received, could possibly equal what they had in store for him.¹⁸ They forgot all about treating him as an infant. Cannon would boom—possibly the double-barrel secret weapon which was cast in Athens in 1862 to win the war, might be got ready to signalize another victory, a different kind from what it was expected to win in the war. Balloons would go up. Every residence, store, and public building would be decorated “with holiday colors,” and make the city “a mass of brilliant bunting.” There should be “an illumination, a torchlight procession and a grand display of pyrotechnics.”¹⁹ As Athens had no military unit, plans were on foot to invite the one in Augusta to come and act as a military guard of honor and give “the old veteran a rousing reception.”²⁰ The *Banner-Watchman* reported, “We never knew our people to be so aroused and enthused as they are at this time.”²¹

There was to be a gathering, including hundreds of old Confederate veterans, larger than had ever before assembled in Athens. In a half-page advertisement of the fair carried in an adjoining county newspaper,²² the prediction was made that 50,000 people would come to honor Davis and attend the fair. (Not far under the surface of all this excitement there was evidently the feeling that it was almost of equal importance to attend the fair and make it a success as it was to honor the old former President of the Confederacy.) Handbills were to be scattered “in every nook and corner of Northeast Georgia—indeed all over the State. It will be the proudest day Athens ever saw when Jefferson Davis presses her soil.”²³ Many people from the adjoining states were expected to come and their governors were to be invited. And, of course, Georgia’s great were to be included: the two Senators, all the Congressmen, and “Uncle Remus,” and “Bill Arp.”²⁴ Governor Gordon was on a speaking trip in the North and could not come.

The eleven vice presidents of the fair were busy creating excitement, and so were the editors of the Northeast Georgia newspapers. The *Hartwell Sun* said: “Go by all means, and take your children, your uncles and your aunts. The mind is narrow and dwarfed that cannot be loyal to the ‘New South’ and at the same

time unite in paying honor to one of the 'Old South's' most chivalrous sons. We would not dwell too much upon this subject, but when at the bare mention of his name enemies begin to cast their foul aspersions on his character we deem it a duty, a privilege rare to raise our voices in his defense."²⁵ A citizen of the adjoining county of Madison declared that "every man, woman and child will come in wagons, buggies, horseback, and ox carts." The people were "anxious to see the man who stood by the South during the dark days. All we want is something to eat and to see Jeff Davis, and we will be happy."²⁶

To help bring the crowds to Athens, the railroads entering the city gave special rates of one cent a mile and no round trip fare on the Georgia Railroad was to exceed \$3.00.²⁷ Special trains were to be run and schedules arranged so that visitors might arrive early in the morning and return that evening after a day at the fair, and thus save the expense of a night's lodging and save the city the task of seeing that such lodging was provided. But Athens promised to take care of every over-night visitor. All of the empty buildings in town were to be provided with cots free to guests, and the residences in town and in the surrounding country were to be thrown open. When once in Athens, visitors were to be taken to the fairgrounds for twenty-five cents. And in addition to frequent runs by the street cars, twenty-five hacks able to accommodate from ten to twenty-four passengers stood ready.²⁸

But for "Ole Jeff Davis," no such ordinary means of transportation were to be used; and it was not to be just six white horses to a carriage as was the method at the Piedmont Exposition to transport President Cleveland. It was to be a carriage drawn by "twelve of the finest Southern raised thoroughbreds to be found in Dixie." Unwisely this decision had been made without consulting the Confederate veterans; now they would put in a word. A headline in the local newspaper streamed forth—"TEN THOUSAND CONFEDERATE VETERANS PETITION TO DRAW 'MARS JEFF'S' CARRIAGE."²⁹ To be specific, an old veteran who had left a leg at Gettysburg insisted that "when

Mars Jeff comes to Athens the team that draws his carriage shall be formed of ten thousand Confederate veterans, and I intend to be one of them, if I live until that great day. I tell you, we cannot honor our great leader too much.”³⁰

And when “Mars Jeff” should come the reception committee was not to be like the one which received President Cleveland—Athenians were determined to outtop the Piedmont Exposition and poke a little fun at the Atlantans. An Athenian who attended that exposition and had been “permitted to view President Cleveland from a respectable distance,” had this to say: “Our President of 1887 was received on his visit to Georgia by a delegation of plug hats and swallow-tail coats. When our President of 1865 comes to Athens, he shall be the guest of the wool hat boys, and there shall be no military or policemen to keep his people from him. Mr. Davis will not be afraid to trust himself in the hands of the devoted multitude who will flock here to see and welcome him, for he will be as tenderly cared for and treated as an infant in the hands of its mother.”³¹

Also the Athenians liked to contrast the patron saint of their fair, the great Confederate Chieftain Jefferson Davis, with the Yankee President Grover Cleveland, whom the Yankee town of Atlanta had selected to preside over its big show. When Cleveland arrived in Atlanta he was given a suite at the Kimball House and to give him protection against over-zealous callers, Governor Gordon had ordered sentinels to be placed at the doors. When a well-wisher, “a ferocious-looking personage,” was denied entrance, he exclaimed with the emphasis becoming his looks, “I wish you would inform Mr. Cleveland that if Georgians are to be barred out from shaking hands with the President of the United States by sabres at the door, by God, sir, he had better go back to Washington. Jeff Davis will be here next week and there’ll be no sabres between him and the gentlemen of Georgia.”³² And the editor of the Athens newspaper seconded this sentiment: “There will be no sabers to keep down enthusiasm in Athens. All the people will have the chance to see Hon. Jefferson Davis.”³³

Although the Northeast Georgia Fair was insisting that it would

equal or even exceed the Piedmont Exposition and the State Fair in Macon, yet, it had hopes of being able to borrow some of their exhibits; and it sent W. S. Holman, a famous horse fancier, to Macon to dangle before the horsemen there the prizes Athens was prepared to offer, and it was certain that he would let no "first-class horse escape." Athens promised that the racing at the Northeast Georgia Fair would be the finest of the season.⁸⁴

The town was now on tiptoes waiting for Davis to arrive in Macon and for the fair there to relinquish him when it should disband at the end of the last week in October. The Northeast Georgia Fair would begin on the following Tuesday of November 1st and continue for the remainder of the week.

Accompanying Davis to Macon were Mrs. Davis, Winnie, and Maggie (Mrs. Hayes). They arrived on Monday, October 24th, about 6 p.m. All along the way at towns where the train had stopped, they were greeted by cheering throngs of people, and on alighting in Macon they were met with a great ovation. Entering carriages they were driven to the palatial home of Capt. J. Marsh Johnston, where they were to be entertained as long as they remained in town. The city was properly decorated with American flags and with a few Confederate flags that the authorities were bold enough to display, to the great disgust of some Northern newspaper reporters.

For the next few days the weather was miserable, with a cold blowing rain; and even had the weather been better, Davis had been so exhausted by his trip that he remained indoors for the next day. The following day had been set aside for his appearance at the fairgrounds where he was to greet a great host of Confederate veterans; but the weather continued so bad that it was decided that he should not venture out. There was much disappointment at the fairgrounds, so great that the veterans, who had come long distances to greet their Chieftain, became disconsolate, until it was agreed that they might march to the Johnston residence to parade before Davis seated on the porch, and receive his greetings. Here took place a ceremony, certainly unusual, and according to an Augusta editor, "So peculiar an ovation was never

given to a mortal man."³⁵ Everyone tried to shake Davis's hand; a Confederate flag was brought up for him to grasp and kiss; presents were given to him and his family; and five thousand on-lookers broke police lines and spread out over the lawn, all trying to even touch Davis. Governor Gordon and Senator Colquitt made short speeches, and General Henry R. Jackson, recently minister to Mexico, made an address reiterating the Old South point of view, which became a national issue. During the ceremonies Davis responded with short remarks. Tears streamed down the old Chieftain's cheeks and he visibly wept. Before the fair closed, Davis visited the grounds on several occasions and received the plaudits of the crowds.³⁶

In Athens there was consternation not over the weather or the ovations to Davis but because of the following telegram which Northen received from Davis before he left Mississippi for Macon: "Beauvoir, Oct. 22 to W. J. Northen. I will leave for Macon to-morrow night. Shall not be able to go to Athens. Medical advisers pronounce it injudiciously venturesome to do so. Jefferson Davis."³⁷ But consternation was soon overcome by a firm determination that Davis must come to Athens; and so sure were the directors of the fair that they could induce him to come that they ran in their half-page advertisement of the fair this sentence: "THE HON. JEFFERSON DAVIS Will Greet the People of North Georgia, and Particularly the VETERANS of the late civil war." His name in letters almost an inch high dominated the advertisement.³⁸

To make good their promise, the fair directors appointed a committee, headed by Chancellor Patrick H. Mell of the University of Georgia, to hurry to Macon. They found Davis flat on his back on a couch in the Johnston home, and for an hour they presented their case. They carried with them an autograph-holograph letter from Mrs. Cobb, inviting the Davis family to be her guests as long as they stayed in Athens. They promised that he would be protected in every possible way against taxing his strength. A special car with every comfort possible would be provided by the Georgia Railroad for the trip to Athens, and the

Davis family would be returned direct to Beauvoir without a change or a charge. There would be no speeches and no hand-shaking. Davis replied by asking "what is the use of my going if I am to be kept away from the people and the people from me?" Continuing, he said, "I wish to see them and take them by the hand. Anything short of this would be unsatisfactory and well nigh useless. But my physician peremptorily protests against the proposal to visit Athens now." And to re-enforce his statement he showed the Committee the physician's letter. Chancellor Mell in reporting the interview, said, "We were thoroughly satisfied that it was not wise for him to come to Athens at this time and so admitted to him."

Before leaving, Chancellor Mell remarked to Davis that the committee represented not only the citizens of Athens but also the students of the University. Davis replied, "Tell the people of Athens and the students of the University that just as soon as my health will permit I will pay them a special visit."³⁹

The loss of Davis was, indeed, a great blow to Athens and her fair. All along, leading up to the fair there had been a covert feeling of rivalry which the Northeast Fair had for the Macon fair, as well as for Grady's Piedmont Exposition; and a person in an adjoining county after attending the Grady show gave this advice to his county newspaper editor: "You can tell your readers and friends that it is nothing but a mammoth humbug, and unless they just want to see Atlanta and a big crowd of people, and be crowded to death, they had better stay at home and save their money."⁴⁰ He was inferring that they should wait and attend the fair at Athens.

But now with the disappointment of Davis not coming, there was a tendency to blame Macon for the hard luck that Athens had suffered, and especially since Athenians felt that Macon was gloating over this discomfiture by spreading the news. In a half-humorous outburst, but, nevertheless, suggestive of an underlying bitterness produced by the slings and arrows that Fate had directed, the Athens editor recounted what miserable weather Macon was having for her fair, how "the rain knocked

the fair square in the face . . . drowned half the enthusiasm of the survivors' reunion." The woebegone veterans huddled around the lunch stands "and wished they had been killed in the war." "Just as Mr. Davis emerged from the dark walls of Fortress Monroe," he continued, "and returned to his home and his people, may we now hope that he can be delivered from the storm gusts of Macon and regain composure and good spirits and nerve in Northeast Georgia." But what more could be expected of Macon, down in the malarial swamps and "bogs of the Ocmulgee!"⁴¹ The Maconians seemed to think they owned Davis, the editor inferred.

Macon did keep Davis for the remainder of his stay in Georgia, but the Mell Committee did not return to Athens empty-handed. They brought back the promise that Davis's two daughters, Winnie and Maggie, would visit Athens. They would leave on Saturday, October 29th, and return to Macon on the following Wednesday, and then the whole Davis family would return to Beauvoir.

Athens would now make the most of Winnie, and Maggie, too, and make everyone forget their disappointment that the great Chieftain could not come—but in nowise down-grading him for not coming. *Rome* (Georgia) showed by words what it thought of Winnie; Athens would show by deeds. Said the *Rome Tribune*, "In all this broad republic, which now clasps in its strong arms the Solid South forever, there is no sweeter type of cordial, gracious womanhood than Winnie Davis, 'the Daughter of the Confederacy.'"⁴²

The Daughters set out in a special car, and all along the line much excitement and cheering crowds were at every stop. When they reached Union Point they were met by a contingent of the Greene Rifles, which drew up as an honor guard when the car was set off to be picked up by the train on the Athens Branch of the Georgia Railroad. The crowd, sprinkled with Confederate veterans, "yelled themselves hoarse," and the Rifles fired a salute of five volleys. John Hart, Captain of the Rifles, who lived in Union Point, had heard early in the morning that the Daughters

would be passing through in the afternoon. Hurriedly he rounded up in Greensboro sixteen men of the company and got them to Union Point in time to serve them an "elegant lunch," before the Daughters arrived.⁴³

When the Daughters reached Athens about 5 p.m., preparations had been completed for their proper ceremonial reception. They were received by a delegation of the most distinguished Athenians and a large crowd of townsmen and University students, who gave a most tremendous rebel yell. The Rifles descended first and formed an honor line and then the ladies, dressed in grey traveling suits, were assisted from the car and placed in the two official carriages, each drawn by four horses, abundantly decorated in red, white, and blue ribbons. They were followed by a procession of carriages, and as they passed through the business district, the streets were lined with people who kept up one continuous rebel yell.⁴⁴

The Daughters were the guests of Mrs. Howell Cobb during their stay in Athens. In the evening of their arrival there was a small reception, when the Rifles appeared on the grounds, gave three cheers, and fired five rounds. Athens was so grateful for the part the Rifles played, that as long as they remained, which was only the next day, the town was turned over to them, and whatever they wanted which they did not see, they were told to ask for.⁴⁵

Winnie was only twenty-three at this time, her sister Maggie, a little older, but she played the part of a queen with her ease, poise, and graciousness. Apparently Sunday was reserved for church and rest; but Monday was filled from morning until after midnight. With Chancellor Mell in charge of the reception party, men and women, they set out to show the Daughters the Athens schools. First they visited the Lucy Cobb Institute, a select finishing school for girls named for a daughter of the famous General Thomas R. R. Cobb, who was killed at the Battle of Fredericksburg. They visited the main building and then the Seney-Stovall Chapel, recently completed, where they heard some exquisite music, vocal and instrumental. During their visit, Mildred Ruther-

ford ("Miss Millie"), the principal, presented personally and individually every one of the students to the Daughters, who were in turn presented by the students beautiful bouquets of flowers. Next they visited the Home School, another young ladies' finishing school, run by Madame Sophie Sosnowski and her daughter ("Miss Callie"). Madame Sosnowski (nee Wentz) was the daughter of the court physician of the Grand Duchy of Baden. She married an exiled Polish officer, and in the course of an eventful life she came to America and established a young ladies' school in Columbia, South Carolina, and was routed out by Sherman's destruction of the city. She then came to Athens to continue her instruction of young ladies. The Daughters went through much the same sort of reception at the Home School which they had enjoyed at the Lucy Cobb Institute.

The road now led to Chancellor Mell's own school, the University of Georgia, the first of the state universities to be chartered, in 1785. They visited the various buildings and the Chancellor herded his students together and presented them individually to Winnie and Maggie.

There was hardly to be a minute free in this social whirl. That evening from five to seven a high tea was given by Mrs. J. W. Nevitt who had sent out invitations for about 150 guests. The ladies came in street dresses and hats and the gentlemen, in Prince Albert coats.

At eight that evening one of the grandest receptions that had ever been given in Athens was held by Capt. Jeptah H. Rucker at his home on Milledge Avenue. Some 300 to 400 guests were invited and the festivities continued beyond midnight. To describe the setting and the decorations from the "matted walk" which "stretched from the carriage curb to the front steps" and give a break-down of the interior of the house, room by room, required a half-column in the local newspaper. The flavor appeared in this paragraph: "The parlors, verandahs, stairways, reception rooms, all, were buried in a perfect sea of loveliest flowers, whose delicate perfume blended with their beauty and the flashing of the brilliant lights. Wurm's orchestra, from Atlanta, discoursed

the most bewitching strains of music, and the whole scene blended in a beauty as dazzling as a fairy palace.”⁴⁶

Thus ended the first day of entertainment. The fair opened on the morrow, and then the announced purpose of Miss Winnie’s coming would be in full display for the masses of people who had come to Athens, hoping at first to see “Mars Jeff,” but willing to compromise on Winnie and Maggie. The bad weather that had plagued the Macon fair was nowhere to be seen now in Athens. The weather here was “bracing and balmy Indian summer”—dubbed “Miss Winnie Davis weather.”⁴⁷

The address inaugurating the fair was given by Senator Colquitt, in the course of which he said, “I congratulate you upon the brightness of the heavens and the gladness of the earth, and upon this beautiful autumn day. I congratulate you, too, that the brightness of this day hath been made the brighter, and the gladness of this earth hath been made the gladder by the presence with us of two of the brightest stars that shine in the Southern cross—the two ‘Daughters of the Confederacy.’”

When the Senator had finished his speech, the Confederate veterans formed in front of the grandstand and faced the carriage in which were seated Winnie and Maggie in company with Mrs. Howell Cobb and her daughter-in-law Mrs. Lamar Cobb. Now Congressman Carlton appeared and made an eloquent short address and introduced the veterans to Winnie and Maggie. Carlton called for Private A. L. Mitchell, who had given one of his arms to the cause of the Confederacy. Mitchell appeared with the old flag of the Troup Artillery and dipped it to the ladies. Winnie and Maggie kissed its folds. Now Carlton cut two stars from it and presented each one to Winnie and Maggie. As touching as this act was, Winnie probably felt like many others have, that this desecration of the old flag should have been omitted. On accepting the star she said, “O, I prize this so much but it is a pity to cut that brave old flag!” The veterans then gave three cheers for Jeff Davis, three cheers for his daughters, and three cheers for Mrs. Howell Cobb. This part of the ceremonies ended with many ladies

who were spectators coming up and paying their respects to the ladies in the carriage.⁴⁸

The fair was now on, and was to last for the next four days. Racing was generally considered "the main feature of the fair, and the ladies, as well as the men, go purposely to see the horses run and trot."⁴⁹ Traveling horsemen going the rounds of fairs, with their horses, were present; but many entries for the races were from the nearby regions. From the adjoining county of Oconee there was the promise that horsemen there would bring twenty, which they had been training for weeks before the fair started.⁵⁰

There was much else besides the races. The Northeast Georgia Fair had not yet developed into the carnival age. It was still designed to promote the industries and economy of the region, household, field, and forest, as well as artistic and cultural interests. As announced by the management, there were to be "Trotting and Running Races Every Day. Bicycle Races Every Day. Balloon ascensions will be added to the usual Magnificent Display of Live Stock, Poultry, Field Products & Farm Machinery, Paintings, household Decorations and the Fine Arts."⁵¹

There were bicycle gymnastics by a fancy rider from Chicago; there was a football game between the University Seniors and the underclassmen, in which the score was 2 to 0 in favor of the Seniors; but the most unusual event was a fox race. A person dragged a fox skin for two miles around over the extensive grounds and then turned loose on the track a pack of hounds. After a half-hour of following the trail with the pack spreading out and sending forth a canine symphony, the dog "Tilden" came in first with bitch "Lizzie" winning second prize.⁵²

It was estimated with considerable exaggeration that there were 25,000 people in Athens for the fair; but with more accuracy the statement was made that there were 8,000 on the grounds in the early morning of the first day.⁵³

The fair was to go on after the first day without Winnie and Maggie, for the next day they were to return to Macon and then home. There was to be, however, one grand fling for them before

they should leave on Wednesday morning, for it had been early announced that the Athenaeum Club would "give a brilliant german Tuesday evening." Planning for this affair had begun the moment when it was learned that the Daughters would come to Athens. To lend added dignity to the occasion, Charles M. Strahan, a young tutor in the Department of Civil and Mechanical Engineering in the University, carried a special invitation to Macon.⁵⁴ It was predicted that the reception and dance would be "the most brilliant social event that ever occurred in Athens."⁵⁵

The clubhouse, situated on the northeast corner of Lumpkin and Broad streets, was brilliantly lighted and decorated with beautiful flowers, a pyramid of them on the main mantlepiece, worked into the initial D, with a portrait of Davis directly above. The favors for the guests were little Confederate flags, miniature horses, and other designs emblematic of the fair. The banquet room was well supplied with "ices, salads, meats, fruit, coffee, chocolate, etc."⁵⁶ Dancing continued on beyond midnight. A feature of the evening was the presentation of gifts of the club to the Daughters, by Professor Henry Clay White of the Chemistry and Geology Department of the University. To Winnie he gave "an exquisite Etruscan gold lock and chain bracelet" with a diamond set in the lock, and to Maggie, a cloverleaf with a diamond in the center.⁵⁷

Such an outburst of social activities in this highly cultured little city was accompanying the stay of the Daughters that an urgent telegram to their father, in Macon, was sent begging him to allow them to prolong their visit; but Davis, who had now been in Macon for ten days, was anxious to leave for Beauvoir on Thursday (November 3) and he wanted the whole family to return together; so their plans were not changed.⁵⁸

Accompanied by a group of congenial Athens friends, Winnie and Maggie left Athens Wednesday morning at 9 o'clock in the private car of the Georgia Railroad Company and arrived in Macon at 6 p.m.⁵⁹ The next morning they were all off for Mississippi, with so many presents for the great Chieftain heaped

upon him by the Maconians that they had to be boxed and sent separately.

The visit of the Jefferson Davis family to Georgia to attend the fairs in Macon and Athens was of nation-wide significance. It gave the Southerners an opportunity to show their love and respect for "the greatest rebel since George Washington," and to demonstrate to the whole country that they were willing to forgive but not to forget, that although they were glad to embrace Henry Grady's "New South" they would by no means forget the "Old South" and what it stood for—a fact amply made clear by Henry R. Jackson in his little speech at the Johnston house in Macon. Regarding Davis himself, such expressions as these were to be found in the Southern press: "the greatest Southern man now living";⁶⁰ "the best beloved man that lives in the wide, wide world";⁶¹ "more love in a Southern heart for Mr. Davis to-day than for all the Presidents that have ruled over us since his reign."⁶²

Many people in the North agreed with the South and applauded its respect for Jefferson Davis and for its remembrance of the principles of the Lost Cause; but there were others who had not forgotten how to wave "the bloody shirt," and now was an opportune time to break out that flag, for a few state elections were about to be held there, and to gain votes it seemed best to recall Andersonville and to indulge a bit in the worst hatreds of wartimes.

Some of the Northern critics did not like the appearance of a few old Confederate flags, which led a Georgia newspaper editor, half-irate and half-humorous, to remark, "Some of the Northern press is raising a rumpus because a few old tattered and torn Confederate flags were displayed in Macon last week. There are a few old Confederate Muskets yet to be found in the South and they might well be presented, or the load thereof, to said Northern press. Then it would let up on its abuse of whatever a Southerner does."⁶³

The *Philadelphia Record* spoke of the "froth of sentiment" at Macon, but asserted that beneath it there was "a calm and settled regard for the restored Union and old-time amity of North and

South."⁶⁴ But the *New York World* came boldly out to say: "Mr. Davis is honored by the Southern people because of his spotless personal character and because he represented their cause in the struggle which terminated happily for all concerned nearly a quarter of a century ago. . . . He is now a feeble old man, whose course is nearly run and who has only a patriot's interest in his country. Would it not be more decent, not to say chivalrous, in the organic editors to permit this honored old age to end in peace rather than to use its expiring days to relight the fires of an extinguished sectional hate for the sake of gaining a few votes from the ignorant or unthinking?"⁶⁵

Jefferson Davis had only two more years of life; his widow lived until 1906. Winnie, who never married, died of pneumonia in 1898, at the age of thirty-four. A correspondent to the *New York World* printed this estimate of her: "Winnie Davis is dead. May I claim the privilege of laying a wreath of perhaps superfluous words upon her bier?

"I knew her personally. I honored her and admired her, and most loyally loved her, as everybody did who had the privilege of knowing her.

"She was an ideal American woman—largely learned, greatly accomplished and wonderfully gifted. But it was not all this that made the children gather about her knees, their mothers take her to their bosoms and their fathers bow in reverence before her exalted womanhood. It was something greater than learning and immeasurably better than culture.

"By all Southerners she was idolized 'The Daughter of the Confederacy.' By all generous minds of whatever section she was loved and honored as the perfect type of that noblest work of God—the American woman."⁶⁶

NOTES

¹Raymond B. Nixon, *Henry W. Grady, Spokesman of the New South* (New York, 1943), 265-66.

²William E. Parrish, "Jefferson Davis Comes to Missouri," in *Missouri Historical Review*, LVII (July, 1963), 344-56.

³Savannah *Morning News*, October 1 (2, 2), 1887. The first number in the parentheses in newspaper citations refers to the page, and the succeeding number, to column.

⁴Athens *Weekly Banner-Watchman*, October 4 (3, 2), 1887.
⁵*Ibid.*, September 27 (3, 3).
⁶*Ibid.*, September 27 (2, 4).
⁷*Ibid.*, September 27 (2, 1).
⁸*Ibid.*, October 4 (1, 2).
⁹*Ibid.* ¹⁰*Ibid.*, October 11 (3, 3).
¹¹*Ibid.*, Savannah *Morning News*, October 9 (1, 7).
¹²Athens *Weekly Banner-Watchman*, October 25 (1, 1).
¹³*Ibid.*, October 18 (2, 3), October 25 (1, 1-3).
¹⁴*Ibid.*, October 25 (1, 3). ¹⁵*Ibid.*
¹⁶*Ibid.*, October 25 (2, 1). ¹⁷*Ibid.*, October 11 (4, 1).
¹⁸*Ibid.*, October 25 (3, 2). ¹⁹*Ibid.*, October 18 (3, 2), October 25 (2, 1).
²⁰*Ibid.*, October 4 (1, 2). ²¹*Ibid.*, October 25 (3, 1).
²²Lexington *Oglethorpe Echo*, October 28. This advertisement was a half page of an insert sheet. It was signed by Sylvanius Morris, Secretary of the Northeast Georgia Fair. Morris was later dean of the School of Law of the University of Georgia.
²³Athens *Weekly Banner-Watchman*, October 18 (1, 1).
²⁴*Ibid.*, October 25 (3, 1). ²⁵*Ibid.*, October 25 (2, 3).
²⁶*Ibid.*, October 25 (3, 4).
²⁷*Ibid.*, October 4 (1, 2). See advertisement, *ibid.*, November 1 (4, 7-9). The railroads running into Athens at this time were the Georgia Railroad; the Piedmont Air Line; the Richmond and Danville; the Gainesville, Jefferson & Southern; and the Northeastern. Actually the round trip fare from Macon was \$3.45, but it included admission to the fairgrounds. The highest two fares quoted, which included admission to the fairgrounds, were \$5.30 from Charlotte, N. C. and return, and \$3.80 from Spartanburg, S. C. and return.
²⁸*Ibid.*, October 25 (3, 1). ²⁹*Ibid.*
³⁰*Ibid.*, October 25 (3, 2). ³¹*Ibid.*
³²*Ibid.*, October 25 (2, 1). ³³*Ibid.* ³⁴*Ibid.*, November 1 (3, 2).
³⁵*Augusta Chronicle*, October 29 (4, 2), 1887.
³⁶*Atlanta Constitution* (daily), October 19 (4, 1), October 25 (1, 1), October 27 (1, 1-2), November 1 (2, 3), 1887; *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, November 1 (5, 1-3), 1887; Athens *Weekly Banner-Watchman*, November 1 (4, 1), 1887.
³⁷*Atlanta Constitution*, October 24 (5, 1).
³⁸Athens *Weekly Banner-Watchman*, October 25 (3, 7-9, advertisement). The advertisement in this newspaper, as well as the one in the Lexington *Oglethorpe Echo*, was run after the news was abroad that Davis had telegraphed that he would not come to Athens, but before the Athens committee had gone to Davis to plead with him to come. The *Echo* editor defended himself against the criticism that he had fooled the people by saying that he had been ordered by the directors of the fair to include the advertisement in the belief that they would succeed in inducing Davis to come. See *Oglethorpe Echo*, November 4 (3, 5).
³⁹*Atlanta Constitution*, October 25 (1, 2); Athens *Weekly Banner-Watchman*, October 25 (1, 3), November 1 (3, 1).
⁴⁰Lexington *Oglethorpe Echo*, October 14 (3, 3).
⁴¹*Macon Weekly Telegraph*, November 1 (6, 2).
⁴²*Ibid.*, November 1 (3, 6).
⁴³*Greensboro Herald and Journal*, November 4 (1, 1); Lexington *Oglethorpe Echo*, November 4 (3, 2).
⁴⁴Athens *Weekly Banner-Watchman*, November 1 (2, 4).
⁴⁵*Ibid.*, November 8 (1, 1).
⁴⁶*Ibid.*; *Greensboro Herald and Journal*, November 4 (1, 5).
⁴⁷Athens *Weekly Banner-Watchman*, November 8 (1, 2).
⁴⁸*Ibid.*, November 1 (3, 1), November 8 (1, 3; 1, 5).
⁴⁹*Ibid.*, October 4 (1, 3). ⁵⁰*Ibid.*, October 4 (3, 1).
⁵¹*Ibid.*, November 1 (4, 7-9, advertisement).
⁵²*Ibid.*, November 8 (1, 9; 3, 1).
⁵³*Ibid.*, November 1 (2, 4), November 8 (1, 9).

⁵⁴*Augusta Chronicle*, October 28 (2, 3). ⁵⁵*Ibid.*, October 30 (1, 6).

⁵⁶*Greensboro Herald and Journal*, November 4 (1, 5-6).

⁵⁷*Athens Weekly Banner-Watchman*, November 8 (1, 8).

⁵⁸*Savannah Morning News*, November 3 (1, 6).

⁵⁹*Lexington Oglethorpe Echo*, November 4 (3, 5); *Athens Weekly Banner-Watchman*, November 8 (1, 2; 1, 8).

⁶⁰*Athens Weekly Banner-Watchman*, October 4 (3, 2).

⁶¹*Atlanta Constitution*, October 24 (5, 1).

⁶²*Lexington Oglethorpe Echo*, October 21 (3, 4).

⁶³*Ibid.*, November 4 (2, 1).

⁶⁴Quoted in the *Savannah Morning News*, October 30 (4, 4).

⁶⁵Quoted in the *Athens Weekly Banner-Watchman*, November 8 (2, 1).

⁶⁶Quoted in the *Greensboro Herald-Journal*, September 23 (3, 2), 1898.

In 1902 a dormitory on the State Normal School in Athens was completed and named the Winnie Davis Memorial Hall.